

BRITISH ASSOCIATION
WINNIPEG, 1909

A Visit to
Lower Fort Garry



Specially issued on the occasion of
a Garden Party, by the
Commissioner of the Hudson's Bay Company
and Mrs. Chipman

Thursday, August 26th, 1909

LOWER FORT GARRY

“The Stone Fort”



A RETROSPECT

PRESS OF
THE WINNIPEG TELEGRAM

Lower Fort Garry

OR

“The Stone Fort”

To the Selkirk settlers and the men of the Red River settlement in the shadow of Old Fort Garry in Winnipeg's beginning, it was the Lower Fort. To the far-flung West that extended from Oregon to the mouth of the Mackenzie, to the trader of the north shore of Lake Superior, in the gossip of the officers' or servants' quarters of the Hudson's Bay Company, by the tepee fires and in the wigwam councils of the Red men of the north, it has ever been distinctively the Stone Fort.

It is a monument of the union of the great fur-trading companies of British America, of the Hudson's Bay Company power at the centre of a continent, the government and commerce of half of which it practically controlled for two centuries. In its stone-walled enclosure, its loop-holes for rifle fire and its mediaeval incompleted bastions, its household, its lawns and gardens, may be read something of the passing of the old order to the new, of the Stuart to the Victorian.

The first and the last residential stone fortress of the virile days of sturt and strife in the fur trade of North America, the walls of the old Stone Fort tell something of the spirit that for a third of a century animated the traders of other days, the spirit that in the isolation of the north land held tenaciously to the ideas that their armor-clad first governor, Prince Rupert, held in the wars of the Rhine, and in fierce conflict with Cromwellian Ironsides.

Named as was Upper Fort Garry, at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, after Nicholas Garry, one of the old committee of directors of the Hudson's Bay Company, who made a prolonged visit to the valley of the Red River shortly after the absorption of its great rival, the Northwest Fur Trading Company, by the Hudson's Bay Company, in 1821, the building of the Stone Fort, as it soon become popularly called, was begun in October, 1831, from the designs of Chief Factor Christie, then Governor of Assiniboia and Officer in Charge of the Red River District. It was the first stone-and-lime-constructed residential building erected in Western Canada. In 1832-3, the dwelling house and stores were completed, and in 1839, the surrounding stone walls, enclosing about five acres, and the four round tower bastions, were built.

Those were the halcyon days of the fur-trade in North America. Through the expansion and prosperity of the fur trade, the dominant personalities of its officers, and the unique and far-reaching powers of the Royal Charter, granted by the merry monarch to his kinsman, Prince Rupert, the Hudson's Bay Company was of greater power and influence than any other corporation in the Western hemisphere. There probably emanated from the Stone Fort, as the social and official centre of that power, presided over by one of the most picturesque and dominant men of the century, policies and edicts that were only exceeded in ultimate effect or territory controlled by the sign manual of a British king or a Russian czar.

Strange gatherings there were in the Stone Fort when Sir George Simpson was governor. When a council was called what unique personalities would be gathered from a territory governed, larger than the continent of Europe. From the ice floes of the mouth of the Mackenzie, from the sunny valleys of the Pacific slope, from the northern shores of Hudson's Bay, from the fastnesses of the Rockies, the keen-eyed, strong-lipped, bearded Factors of the great fur company would come,

and in the little room, hardly twenty feet square, in the governor's residence, there would be determined things that affected the happiness and prosperity of a dozen great tribes, the markets and fashions of London and Paris, and the commerce of half a continent.

No army has ever had such discipline as the Hudson's Bay Company, and no monarch such devoted loyalty and life service as have for over two centuries been given the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay by its officers and servants. Not alone as a great executive, administrative and social centre has the Stone Fort an unique place in the annals of Canada. It was the meeting place, the clearing house, the junction of the great Northern, Southern and Western trade. There the great annual brigades of boats, one from the far north, and the other from the south, would meet, exchange commodities, supplies, furs, tools, guns, articles of trade, letters, etc. Great were these occasions with princely hospitality, genial meeting and festive merriment—the officers of the brigades housed in the quarters, the voyageurs camped on the lawn within the walled enclosure, while down by the shore lay the great brigades of York boats and canoes on whose return with supplies, letters and periodicals to lonely forts depended the comfort and contentment of the natives and other residents in the distant interior.

Those scenes will never come again, and such men will never be. The dominance of a Simpson is now impossible. The taciturn wisdom of the men from the silent places of the north and the absorbing single-minded devotion that isolation alone could beget, have gone under new conditions. The Stone Fort will never again see the groups that gathered within its walls, crowding into a few hours the confidences of years, the gossip of half a continent in the meeting of the brigades. The world will never again see meetings of men that in a few days, in short, explicit phrase, with half a dozen sheets of foolscap, determined the conduct of the business and politics of a region that was almost as large as the

United States of America. The Red River valley will never again see the meeting of the brigades and the gathering of voyageurs by the camp fires before the Stone Fort of Rupert's Land.

It was the last of the old order; but, as one looks from the bastion on the high bank at the splendid sweep of the Red River of the North, at the quaint houses of the settlement, peopled by those whose fathers served "The Company" in succeeding generations, a little of the knowledge of the force and power of the historic company comes to him who understands something of the strange story of the strength and life of the world's greatest fur traders. The old fort, where never hostile shot was fired, is a "sermon in stone" of the traditions and spirit of a company whose two and a quarter centuries of life midst savage races have been forceful, peaceful and honorable. More also than in a political, diplomatic or business sense has the Stone Fort been the scene around which revolved affairs of consequence to the British Empire and to Canada. It has ever been an outpost of science. Scientific observations, astronomical, meteorological, agricultural, etc., were kept at the Stone Fort, and the facts recorded have proved of value in the progress of science and of Western Canada. It was the starting point of scientific tours and journeys of discovery by distinguished men for four decades. It was the refuge of the neighboring settlers in time of flood.

Many are the distinguished men who have been equipped for expeditions from its ample stores or entertained within its walls. It was sought as a holiday spot by almost all the prominent officers of the Company for a third of a century. In the flood of the Red River, in 1852, Colonel Coldwell with his family was a visitor, as well as Bishop Anderson. The late Alexander Grant Dallas sojourned there for a time. The Governors-General of Canada, since the time of the Earl of Dufferin, who first spent a few hours within its walls, have been visitors to the Stone Fort.

In its sitting room was organized the final details of the Franklin Relief Expedition, which was conducted overland to the shores of the Arctic by Dr. Rae.

In 1848, there was quartered for a time a body of British army pensioners, which had arrived from England. In 1857, the pensioners were succeeded by another military force of 120 men of the Royal Canadian Rifles, which, for a time, occupied it. This detachment remained in the Red River country until 1861. No further military forces were stationed in the Stone Fort until 1870, when several companies of the Quebec Rifles, under Col. Jarvis, over 350 in number, were stationed there for a time.

Throughout the Far North and by the firesides of the old time settlers of the Red River, many are the traditions and stories woven about the Stone Fort.

There are stories of expeditions that were begun by explorers who have added much to the maps and knowledge of the world. Robert Kennicott, of the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, left the Stone Fort in 1859 for the valley of the Mackenzie, where he remained for three years and thereby greatly enriched the collections of the great institute he represented. The high bank where the Stone Fort stands has been the scene of strange events since the time of Monsieur de la Verandrye, the distinguished explorer, who was the first white man that passed within its shadow, in 1733, but probably there has been no stranger than the alleged interview that took place in the bedroom adjoining the sitting room of the Fort in the winter of 1869-70.

Lord Strathcona, then Donald A. Smith, than whom there has never been a more trusted officer of the Hudson's Bay Company or a man of farther-reaching personal influence, had been appointed commissioner by the Canadian Government to negotiate a settlement of the grievances of the French half-breeds of the Red River. Louis Riel, the half-breed leader, had vainly endeavored to obtain impracticable concessions from the quiet, courteous, but impregnable Hud-

son's Bay officer and Canadian commissioner. The rebel leader is said to have ridden during the night from Fort Garry to the Stone Fort, and shortly after midnight to have demanded, with his armed attendants, an interview with the commissioner.

Before word could be conveyed to Mr. Smith, who had retired to his apartments, the reckless leader had forced his way to the bedside. The interview was brief. Before day had dawned Louis Riel rode silent and preoccupied back to Fort Garry. His dream of power was broken.

That was little more than thirty years ago, and the world of the Canadian West has changed much since those days. The Hudson's Bay Company has changed with it, but only in methods, not in spirit. The company's motto on the arms that emblazon their banners, "*Pro Pelle Cutem*," has never been disregarded. The Hudson's Bay Company is the same in spirit as in the earliest days of its pathfinders, when the northern and western world of America was young, the spirit that made the first governor, Prince Rupert, the "gallant chevalier" of Europe. In Lord Strathcona, the governor of to-day, that spirit is recognized in the appreciation of the civilized world. In the Commissioner, Mr. C. C. Chipman, who is the Company's head in North America, and whose summer residence is within the walls of the historic Stone Fort, and in the officers of the Company, it is told in the words of the Governor at the last general meeting of the shareholders of the Company in London:—

"It gives me the greatest pleasure to reiterate what we said at the last meeting, that The Commissioner and those acting under him, are not only a body of gentlemen of great intelligence and practical ability, but that they devote themselves most thoroughly to the furtherance of your best interests."

The old Stone Fort, however, and its traditions, which make up a considerable part of the story of Western Canada, its trees and its gardens, tell more, possibly, than even do appreciative annual reports.

